

Mismanagement Plagues Anti-Poverty Programs

MAY 11, 1966

PRESS-HERALD B-9

By ALPHONZO BELL, Congressman, 28th District. Mismanagement and administrative confusion have highlighted the need for basic changes in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Instead of assistance for 35 million Americans, friction, misunderstanding, and bitterness among officials at all levels of government, between charitable groups and government, between local officials and the poor, and even among the poor themselves have been produced by the poverty program. A considerable amount of the \$2.3 billion appropriated has thus far been mis-

spent. Some 435,000 "Li'l Abner" comic books gathering dust in Washington, D.C. warehouses are evidence of what happens when legislation gives an agency carte blanche to do as it pleases. In 1964, the Office of Economic Opportunity had asked comic strip artist Al Capp to produce a comic book which would appeal to potential Job Corps recruits. Time and talent donated by Capp yielded "Li'l Abner and the Creatures from Drop-Outer Space," an effort valued by OEO at between \$150,000 and \$200,000. Printing alone cost \$25,000.

But officials at the Office of Economic Opportunity changed their minds about how to reach their market. The books were never distributed. Not only were time, talent, and money wasted, but the government has been paying storage costs of \$125 a month since July, 1965.

AN INCIDENT which might have had drastic consequences for California concerns the Adult Basic Education program, designed to teach thousands of illiterate adults the skills without which it is almost impossible to find gainful employment and a sense of dignity. California premised part of its

very successful Adult Basic Education program on funds pledged by the Office of Economic Opportunity last June. Subsequent notices from OEO to the California State Department of Education, however, reduced the promised amount to less than half.

When queried, OEO claimed it had no money with which to honor its pledge. My protests along with those of other Congressmen resulted in restoration of funds to California almost reaching the original total. This of course is

gratifying, but I deplore the toll of disappointment and confusion. And I regret that not all states may be as fortunate in the end as was California.

I BELIEVE California's experience resulted directly from the way Title 11B of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was written. Although the Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare should manage federal participation in state educational programs,

ultimate authority here rests with another federal agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity. Coordination is not always evident.

Because the poor are not being helped, I have recently introduced a bill to modify substantially the law under which the anti-poverty pro-

gram is administered. Among other features, it would place the federal share of responsibility for Adult Basic Education programs directly with the Office of Education; it would give Congress more control over federal anti-poverty activities; it would provide for greater state par-

ticipation; and it would clearly define guidelines for community action programs.

The rash of misadventures and mishaps make it likely that substantial changes in the poverty bill will now obtain more support. We who are truly concerned about the plight of the poor certainly hope so.

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